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APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM AT THE BALDWIN LOCOMOTIVE WORKS, PHILADELPHIA

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Superintendent of Apprentices.

On the first day of January, 1901, the Baldwin Locomotive Works re-established a system of indentured apprenticeship which had fallen into disuse for over twenty-five years on a basis adapted to existing social and business conditions. The plan adopted met with general favor both among the employees and the public, a large number taking advantage of the opportunity became indentured the first year.

In order that the undertaking should have proper supervision, and to conserve the best interests of all concerned, the work was placed in charge of one man specially appointed. By this method it was possible to maintain uniformity of discipline and shop regulation in the different departments and to properly direct and supervise the instruction of the apprentices.

Description of System

Apprentices are taken in three classes. The first class includes boys seventeen years of age who have had a good common school education and who bind themselves by indenture, with the consent of parent or guardian, to serve four years, to be regular in attendance at their work, to obey all orders given them by foremen or others in authority, to recognize the supervision of the firm over their conduct out of as well as in the shops, and to attend such night schools during the first three years of their apprenticeship as will teach them in the first year elementary algebra and geometry and in the remaining years the rudiments of mechanical drawing.

The second class is similar to the first, but includes boys eighteen years old who have had a high school or college preparatory school education, and who bind themselves, with the consent of parents or guardian, to serve three years. This boy is obligated to attend night school the first two years of his apprenticeship for

instruction in mechanical drawing, unless he has already had sufficient instruction in that work.

The third class indenture is in the form of an agreement made with persons over twenty-one years of age who are graduates of colleges, technical schools or scientific institutions and who desire to secure instruction in practical shop work.

There is no school maintained at the works by the firm for its apprentices, no clubs, guilds or assemblies of any kind, paternalism being avoided wherever possible. The indentures in the first and second classes provide for attendance at the public schools, although a large percentage attend the night sessions of the scientific institutions, of which there are a number in the city. While a knowledge of higher mathematics and mechanical drawing is desirable and necessary and the attainment of proficiency in these branches is provided for, the vocational education of the apprentice is, however, most to be desired, if a class of good all-round mechanics is to be the result of the system.

All applications for employment under the system are made to the superintendent of apprentices, who has general charge and decides as to the acceptability of the applicant. The individual is required to make formal application in his own handwriting on a blank form provided for the purpose, stating what trade he wishes to learn, his age, school attendance, branches of study pursued, name of parents or guardian and residence. If the applicant is found to be physically able, and of good moral character, he is accepted on thirty days' probation, and if at the end of that time his conduct and service have been satisfactory he is indentured and paid a fixed wage per hour, increasing each year. If he completes the full term of his apprenticeship faithfully and well a bonus of one hundred and twenty-five dollars is paid to first-class and one hundred dollars to second-class boys.

Apprentices in the first and second classes are not permitted to work at the same process more than three months, or in one shop or department more than one year. Apprentices in the third class have change of occupation in the department to which they are assigned at any time they may desire by making application to the foreman. They are changed from one department to another every six months. When an apprentice has been indentured and assigned to a department the foreman in charge is furnished a blank form

on which is kept a complete record of the apprentice's conduct and service. This record is sent with the boy, to the foreman of the next department to which he may be transferred. The last period of one year or six months of each apprenticeship is spent in the erecting shop. His record is here completed and is filed with the original indenture when the term of service has expired.

Each sub-foreman or contractor has a number of boys and is held responsible for their vocational training while under his supervision. The discipline, however, remains with the foreman of the department, subject to appeal, in exceptional cases, to the head of the apprentices' department, whose duty it is to see that all indentured obligations are strictly observed, that changes of occupation and changes from one department to another are regularly made, that the apprentice attends school regularly and is given abundant opportunity to acquire a thorough knowledge of his trade.

School attendance is obligatory. A satisfactory excuse must be given for non-attendance. The attendance of the apprentices at the night sessions of the public and other schools has been remarkably good considering that the younger boys, less physically and mentally able, have been at work for ten hours. The attendance of those registered at the public schools in the session of 1907-08 was 84 per cent and of those registered at the scientific institutions 89 per cent, which is about the average of past years.

Results

The system as adopted in its practical application has worked out upon the whole quite satisfactorily. The apprentices come from all parts of the country, in fact, from all over the world, and it could, therefore, not be expected that all those who complete their terms should remain as journeymen in the employ of the works. It is a fact, however, that on the 1st of January, 1908, three years after the first indentured apprentice completed his term, there were employed over two hundred graduated first-class all-round mechanics capable of assignment to any shop work, and of this number fifty occupied places of responsibility as heads of departments, foremen, assistant foremen, contractors and leading workmen. It is no longer necessary to go outside of the works for any talent desired.